DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 833 SP 028 943

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TITLE A Study of Lortie's "Apprenticeship-of-Observation" Theory in Physical Education.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; *Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Physical Education; *Physical Education Teachers; Preservice Teacher Education; Socialization; *Staff Development; *Student Teachers; *Teacher Orientation; Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS *Apprenticeship of Observation Theory

ABSTRACT

This study tested the reliability of Lortie's (1975) "apprenticeship-of-observation" theory in the development of physical education teachers. The theory suggests that beginning teachers' socialization into teaching starts when they are students and serves to perpetuate traditions at the expense of reflective and informed change. Forty-nine physical education student teachers filled out report forms before and after a 10-week student teaching experience detailing "critical incidents" that were indicative of good or poor teaching. Analysis of data derived from these reports indicated that teachers became acquainted with the tasks of teaching during their apprenticeship-of-observation and that teachers appeared to begin their identification as teachers during their apprenticeship. Assessments of teaching technique were similar both prior to and after entry into the teaching role. Because the apprenticeship represented an analysis of personal experience, a teacher's analytic orientations toward the work of teacher were individualistic. It is concluded that physical education teachers, like their classroom counterparts, appear to serve an apprenticeship-of-observation while students in public schools. The apprenticeship period informs the prospective physical education teacher of the tasks of teaching, establishes assessment strategies for determining the quality of teaching, and provides the analytic orientation toward their professional work. (CB)

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A Study of Lortie's "Apprenticeship-of-Observation" Theory in Physical Education

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Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
April, 1987
Washington, D.C.

Running Head: Apprenticeship-of-Observation

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Socialization into teaching begins when a person first enters the cultural site of a teacher: the school. The first role one assumes in a school culture is the role of student. Therefore socialization into teaching begins while teachers are students. This beginning phase of socialization lasts the duration of time spent as a student, or until formal teacher education begins.

Lortie (1975) described this early socialization period as an "apprenticeship-of-observation." The apprenticeship begins the process of socialization by acquainting the student with the tasks of teaching and developing an identification with teachers. The apprenticeship, however, does not appear to lay the foundation for informed assessment of teaching technique or encourage the development of analytic orientations toward the work of teachers. The individualistic preconceptions of teaching, grown firm from many years in public schools, hold the strength to weather the undergraduate experience with little change. They are carried into and even verified by the workplace of teaching. Thus, the apprenticeship-of-observation serves to perpetuate traditions at the expense of reflective and informed change.

The purpose of this study was to test the tenability of Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship-of-observation theory in the development of physical education teachers. The theoretical propositions underlying the theory provided the investigative focus of the study.

METHOD

Teachers. Forty nine physical education student teachers served as the subject population. Their student teaching experience required them to teach 5 weeks in an elementary school and 5 weeks in a high school. Student teachers were used in this study because student teaching represents the first opportunity for a person to assume a sustained teaching role. The use of student teachers was also consistent with protocol established in previous research on the early phases of teacher socialization (Hoy & Rees, 1977; Tabachnick, Popkewitz, & Zeichner, 1980; Templin, 1981).

Data Collection. In formulating the apprenticeship-of-observation theory, Lortie (1975) found the most useful data came from descriptions and recollections teachers gave of their past teachers. The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used for collecting data in this study as it was believed amenable to accessing and analyzing the data forms Lortie found useful in establishing his theory. Two report forms were developed; one for preentry into teaching and the other for postentry. The first form requested reports of incidents indicative of good and poor teaching witnessed while the teacher was a student in public schools. The second form requested reports of incidents indicative of good and poor teaching based on recollections of the teachers own practice. Preentry data were collected five weeks prior to student teaching and postentry data were collected during the final two weeks of the 10-week experience.

Analyzing these observations made it possible to formulate and compare the perceptions of teaching task requirements held while students to perceptions held as teachers. Comparing these perceptions allowed the tenability of the theory to be tested.

Data Analyses. The data were analyzed in a three-step process. First, a general frame of reference was established. The theoretical propositions served as the reference. Secondly, data were reviewed with reference to the propositions for the purpose of inducing category schemes. The final step was to determine the level of specificity or generality to be used in reporting the data. Because the perspectives and behaviors reported in the incidents represented the teachers' individual interpretations, decisions needed to be made as to which behaviors and perspectives represented generally held perspectives which were unique to time, place, and circumstance.

FINDINGS

The findings will be presented in reference to the propositions set forth in the apprenticeship-of- observation theory.

Proposition One: teachers become acquainted with the tasks of teaching during their apprenticeship-of-observation. The teachers in this study appeared to have been acquainted with an extensive array of teaching tasks during their apprenticeship. Four major categories of teaching tasks were identified in both pre- and postteaching

data. The first category was tasks relative to student learning. These tasks included content selection, teaching style, and student evaluation procedures. The second category was tasks relative to class operation; such as student supervision, establishment and enforcement of rules for student behavior, class routines, and the use of class time. Third were tasks relative to teacher/student interpersonal relationships and included being fair and just, serving as a counselor, friend or confidant, and establishing relationships based on trust and/or respect. The final category was tasks relative to the exhibition of a teacher's personal characteristics. This category included such tasks as serving as a role model, being assertive, and demonstrating leadership qualities. These findings supported Lortie's (1975) contention that teachers begin learning the tasks of teaching during their apprenticeship-of-observation.

Proposition Two: teachers begin their identification as teachers during their apprenticeship. Contrary to the tenets of the apprenticeship theory, the teachers of this study did not appear to form an identification with teachers while they were students in physical education. There were, in many cases, teachers that were admired, but the data suggests that many of the student teachers did not consider their physical education teachers to be outstanding teachers. Physical education teachers do not appear to be the professional role models for subsequent generations.

Why? Several reasons seem plausible, either singularly or in combination. Critical to developing an identification with teachers in the apprenticeship period is the time of decision to enter teaching (Lortie, personal communication, July 7, 1986). The earlier one makes the decision to enter teaching, the stronger the identification with teachers encountered during the apprenticeship period. Data on time of decision was, unfortunately, not gathered in the course of this study. A second reason for the lack of identification with physical educators may reside in the determinants of career choice. Bain and Wendt (1983) found that a primary determinant for entering physical education was not teaching, but rather coaching. In these cases the coach would be the more likely role model and the identification for the prospective teacher would be with the coaching profession and not teaching. In a personal communication on this matter, Lortie (personal communication, July 7, 1986) questioned the influence of role models outside the school on the developing physical

educator (i.e. camps, YMCAs, & athletic teams). A third potential explanation was identified by several of the studied teachers themselves. They reported limited experience in physical education classes while they were students. Only in a very few schools does time in physical education equal time spent in other subject matter areas. Given the time limitations, an apprenticeship in physical education would be of lesser influence than for classroom teachers.

Proposition Three: assessments of teaching technique are similar both prior to and after entry into the teaching role. In this study, pre- and postentry assessments of good and poor teaching technique were similar. Assessment criteria appeared based on personal appeal and emotion rather than professional knowledge. The teachers based their judgements on feelings and beliefs, and focused on uninformed, simplistic observations. The assessments were random and practical rather than systematic and problematic. The assessments focused on the teacher as an independent entity faced only with the immediate concerns of the class. These findings support Lortie's (1975) contention that an apprenticeship does not ". . . lay the basis for informed assessment of teaching technique or encourage the development of analytic orientations toward the work (of teaching)" (p. 67). What constituted good teaching then constitutes good teaching now; there is no great divide between preentry and postentry evaluations. Training (and even subsequent experience) is not a dramatic watershed separating the perceptions of naive laymen from later judgements by knowing professionals" (p. 66).

Proposition four: because the apprenticeship represents an analysis of personal experience, a teacher's analytic orientations toward the work of teaching are individualistic. The teachers in this study depicted teaching as an activity performed by an individual in the presence of a group called students. Responsibility for in-class activity rested entirely with the teacher; including incidents of disruptive student behavior. The resources used by teachers to orchestrate the actions necessary to meet classroom responsibilities were primaryly personal characteristics such as assertiveness, confidence, and respect. Other teachers and administrators were mentioned in a few postentry reports, but these incidents recounted those individuals reinforcing and confirming individual decisions made by the teacher. Collegiality was not viewed as an essential element in a teacher's work.

Although personal and individual characteristics formed the analytic orientation in both the pre- and postentry reports, a change in the nature of those characteristics was detected. A shift from empathetic characteristics (e.g. caring, friendly, encouraging, and being fair) to more technical characteristics (flexible, organized, and concise) was noted. This finding supports Lortie's (1975) conclusion that the apprenticeship is formed from the perspective of a student. It appears, however, the work orientation is formed with sufficient strength and flexibility to incorporate the shifting concerns encountered as one leaves the world of the student and enters the occupation of teacher.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, physical education teachers, like their classroom counterparts, appear to serve an apprenticeship-of-observation while students in public schools. The apprenticeship period informs the prospective physical educator of the tasks of teaching, establishes assessment strategies for determining the quality of teaching, and provides the analytic orientation toward their professional work. The perspectives toward teaching formed during the apprenticeship are personal and individualistic; which mitigates against collective and reflective change in the current practices of physical education teachers. Teachers and teacher educators alike must begin to recognize and work through the power of the apprenticeship if change is to be realized. To ignore the socialization effects of the apprenticeship is to yield to its unintended influence.

In this regard, physical education may have something unique to offer the larger field of education. The influence of the apprenticeship may be less for the physical education teacher than for their classroom colleagues. The length of time in physical education as a student and the lack of identification with other physical education teachers indicates the foundation upon which the apprenticeship perspectives are based may not be as formidable as they are for other teachers. Therefore the likelihood of altering apprenticeship perspectives in favor of a more informed perspective is greater. To realize this potential, future research must uncover more thoroughly the physical education teacher's sources of occupational ideology. The socializing influences of the preservice, induction, and inservice phases of a teachers' career all need careful examination. Understanding and connecting the intricacies of

these socializing factors to the occupational tasks and perspectives are necessary prerequisites for changing, refining, and improving the work of teachers in gymnasiums.

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